



Wrong Man?

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President Johnson's designation of Thomas C. Mann, an old Texas chum, to assume command of U.S. Latin-American policy created perhaps the first serious behind-the-scenes conflict of the Johnson regime.

There will be no loud public argument; the matter is settled and those who are reliably reported to have voiced private lack of enthusiasm for the choice—including Averell Harriman, Sargent Shriver and others closely identified with President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress vision—will record no dissent.

That President Johnson anticipated criticism of the selection was apparent from the swiftness with which Hubert Humphrey and other Democratic liberals were mobilized to volunteer public defense of Mann on the floor of the Senate, as if to disarm any opposition before it could be formed.

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A public row over such an appointment would have been unlikely and probably unrewarding anyway at this stage of the new President's career. But the overt elation with which the Mann appointment has been received in right-wing circles underlines the potential impact of the dubious decision. Such exuberance will strengthen the apprehension the move has evoked among enlightened Latin-American diplomats searching for hints of any new American direction in their bailiwick.

Mann may confound all expectations; the realities of high responsibility alter many men. But it would be no service to conceal the anxieties stirred by his emergence in so strategic a role. Not among the Communists, as the right-wing commentators have suggested, but in the progressive, non-Communist "Third Force" which offers the only valid alternative to Castroism and rightist military dictatorship on the Latin battleground.

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Mann's past positions are partly matters of record and partly an open secret in the Latin-American community. In one way or another, as one expert remarked yesterday, Mann has been "intimately connected with every aspect of our disastrous Cuban policy from 1958 on." A veteran career diplomat, Mann is held largely accountable by liberal anti-Communist Cubans for U.S. discouragement of those independent spirits who sought, during the twilight of the Batista era, to establish their own Third Force, hostile to Batista and Castro alike, before the Castro take-over.

In 1960 he was Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and a major civilian promoter of the Bay of Pigs fiasco. It was after that tragedy that John F. Kennedy began his anguished reassessment of our failure of intelligence—with both a large and a small "I." One of the results of his reflections was the transfer of Mann to the lesser role of U.S. Ambassador to Mexico.

Yet, as his right-wing apologists now boast, Mann could not remain aloof from Cuban affairs; from his outpost in Mexico, during the 1962 Kennedy-Khrushchev confrontation, he was reported urging a quick "air strike." Fortunately, President Kennedy had learned the lesson of impetuosity and his calm resolve prevailed in that critical juncture.

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Such tactical errors may be less important than the deeper misjudgments on which they were founded. The impression Mann has steadily conveyed is of excessive reliance on the obsolete simple-mindedness of "toughness," of obsessive concern with the status of U.S. private investment, of hostility to the indigenous forces of reform and rebellion in a hemisphere where poverty is the central fact of life, of a certain derisiveness toward the "sentimental" idealism underlying the Alliance for Progress.

One of the largest phases in the Presidential education of John F. Kennedy involved Latin America. More and more he came to believe in the value of establishing dialogue and rapport with Latin-American intellectuals who so often shape the political climate of their underprivileged lands. There is no evidence that Mann saw any merit in such efforts.

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The assumption in Washington is that President Johnson chose Mann without reference to ideological preconceptions.

The friendship between the two men goes way back; as one informed character observed, "Johnson wanted a guy in this job in whom he had complete personal trust." Other Presidents have chosen top aides on exactly that ground, giving a higher priority to private loyalty than special competence. President Johnson's words since he took office have been full of affirmation of his allegiance to the spirit of the Alliance for Progress, and he has both publicly and privately expressed his preoccupation with the blight of poverty—within and outside the U.S.

One is tempted to hope that the President is convinced he can make a new Mann of this old associate.

One also hopes, however, that Mann is aware amid the plaudits from the right, that he takes office under a critical hemispheric spotlight. His defender have chosen to describe him as a "hard-headed hard-liner." Their description will hardly constitute an advertisement for him among those Latin-Americans who had detected in John F. Kennedy a deepening quality of compassion, and a growing concern for human rights over property rights, that bore no resemblance to the caricatures of "Yankee imperialism." Mr. Mann starts work under a large shadow.